

Breast cancer patients sought for study of lymph node removal

The Columbia River Oncology Program (CROP) in the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan area has begun enrolling breast cancer patients in a study that will shed light on the long-term effects of removing only one or a few underarm lymph nodes during surgery. The new study seeks to resolve a much-debated question in breast cancer treatment: Is it safe to remove only the sentinel node - the first node or nodes to which the cancer is

likely to spread - in women whose sentinel node biopsies are negative for cancer?

Thousands of women across the country will participate in this clinical trial, which is being sponsored by the National Cancer Institute and carried out by the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project (NSABP). Dr. Keith Lanier, an NSABP member who is heading the study at CROP, said that enrollment is open to newly diagnosed pa-

tients with early stage breast cancer. In all, nearly 5400 women across the country will participate.

Selected surgeons at the Legacy Health System hospitals, the Providence Health System hospitals and the Southwest Washington Medical Center have been specially trained to perform the procedure.

Previous studies suggest that when the sentinel node is negative, the other nodes are also negative in the majority of cases and may not need to be removed. A growing number of surgeons and patients are interested in this technique, because removing only the sentinel node may reduce the risk of side effects that sometimes occur following lymph node removal. These side effects can affect quality of life and can include lymphedema in the arm (swelling caused by excess fluid buildup), numbness, a persistent burning sensation, infection and limited shoulder motion.

In the sentinel node biopsy procedure, surgeons identify the first underarm lymph node (or nodes) to which lymph

drains from the area of the breast tumor and remove this sentinel node. If it is positive for cancer, more of the underarm, or axillary, lymph nodes are then removed. If the sentinel node is negative, the other nodes are left intact.

"The problem is that no one knows what the long-term impact of removing only the sentinel node is on the course of the disease," said Dr. Lanier. "We don't know how it affects survival time or cancer recurrence. This is crucial information, which women and their doctors need when making decisions about treatment, and the new study will provide it."

All patients who enroll in the

trial will receive radiation and/or chemotherapy and hormonal therapy after surgery so that any cancer remaining in the nodes will be treated. Researchers will follow patients for several years after surgery to watch for signs of cancer recurrence.

Patients and physicians interested in finding out more about the study may call CROP at 503-216-6260 or toll-free, 1-800-677-6752 ext. 66260.

Information is also available from the National Cancer Institute's toll-free Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER and on the NCI's web site for clinical trials, at <http://cancertrials.nci.nih.gov>.

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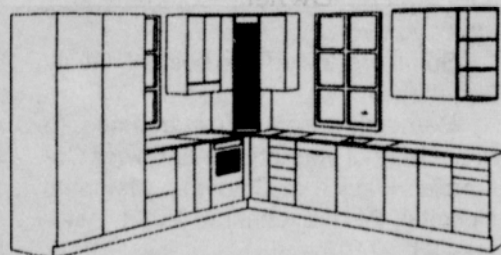
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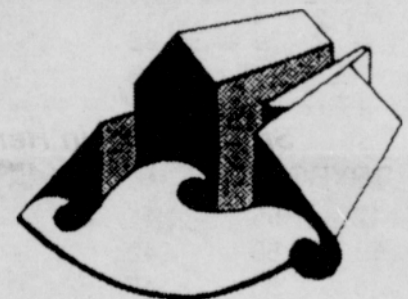
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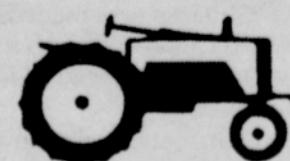
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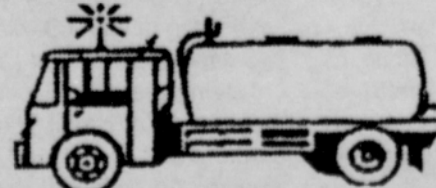
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